

# CRITICAL DIGEST

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

## New York Theatre Diary

Lambertville Music Circus- 6/5/53. Opening of 5th season of St. John Terrell's music-in-the-round-tent theatre. 16 week program opens with Sweethearts, and includes Panama Hattie the week of June 16...Maya- Theatre de Lys 6/9/53. First production by Terese Hayden of 4 plays, each playing 1 week...1953 Aquashow-6/23/53. 9th season of Elliott Murphy's water shows at amphitheatre in Flushing Meadow Park, Queens...Night In Venice- Jones Beach Theatre 6/25/53. 2nd Season of Mike Todd's super outdoor production of Strauss operetta.

## Current Theatre Reviews

Me and Juliet-Majestic 5/28/53. Mixed notices filed on Rodgers and Hammerstein new musical on show business. None of the daily reviews could be counted as raves, while 4 mild pro votes and 4 mild con votes were recorded. Critics generally agreed that Rodgers score was acceptable if not brilliant, while Hammerstein's book tended to be on the dull side. Jo Mielziner's scenery received unanimous approval for its ingenuity. Cast headed by Isabel Bigley, Bill Hayes, Mark Dawson, and Joan McCracken were applauded. News, Herald Tribune, Post and Eagle reviewers filed the mild pro notices. Chapman, News, summed up the proceedings as large, lavish and dullish tribute to show business with enough lively elements to provide a pleasant evening. Kerr, Herald Tribune, noted the dizzying collection of independently attractive fragments. While Watts, Post, listed as its pleasant virtues a number of attractive songs, bright, intelligent lyrics and an attractive cast of singing actors who always know what they are up to. All listed evening as minor Rodgers and Hammerstein. Times, Mirror, Journal American and Women's Wear critics dissented because they feared none of the brighter moments of the show could overcome the heavy, dullish backstage story. Atkinson, Times, especially lauded dances staged by Robert Alton. But he concluded that all the captivating things everyone loves in a Rodgers and Hammerstein show struggle with a book that has no velocity. To the Times aisle sitter the show looked like a rehearsal, not the finished product. Coleman, Mirror, panned the book as dull and minus laughs, the score mediocre, and the whole evening a mistake. McClain, Journal American, has no doubt the show will be a hit, but it should be much better. He blamed Hammerstein for a story that lacks style and excitement, and both partners for an uninspired job of casting. Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, didn't file a complete notice, noting that he would give more details in a follow up review.

Highlights of the Empire-Empire 5/24/53. Edna Wallace Hopper stole the nostalgia filled evening sponsored by ANTA. Her scene from "The Girl I Left Behind Me", the theatre's first tenant in Jan 1893, rated as the favorite with all of the reviewers who reported on the event. 125 took part in scenes from plays which played at the playhouse which will be torn down this summer to make way for a modern skyscraper. The builder of the new building has donated the theatre's furniture, fixtures and chairs to the Barter Theatre of Virginia. The entire cast autographed the No 1 dressing room door which will be shipped to the Players' Club of Hollywood.

## 1952-53 Season Summary

64 shows opened in the 1952-53 season, Variety sums up. Records reveal 12 hits, 8 whose status not yet definite and 29 failures. This includes 10 which folded out of town. Trade paper survey noted better shows in all categories over the preceding dim season. Weekly also called season notable for its absence of any violent outburst against the critics, in NY at least.

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 ' Off Broadway '  
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Verily I Do, a new hillbilly mountain comedy by George W. Savage and Gladys Savage is being presented at Originals Only Mondays through Thursdays... The Servant Girls by Jean Genet will be shown with Philoctetes June 24 at Dramatic Workshop's Experimental Theatre Department... American Lyric Theatre opens its 2nd NYC summer season June 17 at 318 West 57th with Brandy is My True Love's Name, a short musical play by Atra Baer and Martin Kalmanoff, and Where There's a Will, a one act play by Lexford Richards.

Helen Craig has replaced Jo Van Fleet in Maya, opening production June 9 of Teresa Hayden's program at Theatre de Lys. Roger Kay is directing the revival of the Simon Cantillon play, and cast also includes Key Medford, Martin, Ritt, Leo Penn, Joanne Roos, John Heidebrand and Sono Osato. Percy Mackaye's The Scarecrow will be presented June 16.

Circle in the Square will produce either The Duke and the King, a folk comedy based on "Huckleberry Finn", or The Battle Of The Ages, Tennessee Williams first produced play which flopped in Boston.

"BBP" is presenting The Silver Cord at Provincetown Playhouse. Berne Bachrach staged revival with cast including Jai Lybel, Meri Richards and Robert Lewis. The initials stand for "Bought a Barn in Pennsylvania" and the group hopes to convert said barn into a theatre with this summer's profits.

Mask Players revival of the off Broadway favorite mystery play by Ken Parker There's Always a Murder was recommended as a most creditable little production by Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun. Mystery held drama critic's interest to end, while cast was tabbed pleasantly effective without any of its members reaching heights of originality or force.

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 ' Vaudeville '  
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Vic Damone heads new Paramount stage bill, with Joey Bishop and Richard Hayman and orchestra... Artie Dam and Alphonse Berge's models are highlights of new Palace bill.

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 ' Theatre Film Notes '  
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Pier Angeli will play Juliet in new MGM production of "Romeo and Juliet"... "The Baker's Wife", French film, will be produced as a play next fall by Bruce Becker and Ellis Miller... Pat O'Malley will sub for John Williams, Dial M For Murder, while latter plays his original role in Warners' film this summer... Basil Rathbone, who will star on Broadway next season in Sherlock Holmes will make his 1st film in 5 years this summer, "Mr Casanova" for Paramount.

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 ' Theatre Record Notes '  
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Me and Juliet original cast album which will be cut by RCA Victor Sunday May 31, will be at dealers June 4... Can-Can original cast album out in an 11 hour Sunday session by Capitol will be at dealers by June 15... RCA Victor making album based on Abel Green-Joe Laurie, Jr "Show Biz-Vaude to Video" with George Jessel as narrator

On Your Toes album recorded by Columbia Records recommended in various degrees by quintet of reviewers. Portia Nelson, Jack Cassidy and Laurel Shelby are featured, with Lehman Engel conducting. Billboard reviewers staff rated album 77 out of a possible 100, while Gross, Variety agreed with Billboard pewsitter that production was topdrawer. Watt, New Yorker, was pleased to rediscover "Quiet Night" song, which seems to him one of the best ever written by Rodgers & Hart. Main credit given conductor by Wilson, Times, for his ability to catch and bring out the slyer nuances of Rodgers' score. Critic found the occasional use of a harpsichord or a 2 piano team to back up the soloists especially effective. While Zinnser, Herald Tribune, enjoyed the album he did think Miss Nelson at times showed a voice so tremulous that it often threatened to evaporate entirely. This album presents "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue" completely for the first time.

MGM Noel Coward album, featuring 8 of the playwright-actor-composer's songs rated as unalloyed entertainment by Bagar, World Telegram & Sun.

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 ' Green Room Department '  
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**TRUSTING CRITICS...**Neither the success or failure of a given play stems inevitably from the reviews unless the basic audience appeal, or lack thereof, of the play backs them up, points out Watts, Post. There is no reason to expect the drama critic to represent the least common denominator of public taste, the reviewer reasons. It is a good idea if he is able to estimate and understand it, but his own taste should be equal to the best of what the theatre in its highest flights can offer. Because he considers criticism a very personal and subjective thing, Watts explained, he sets down his viewpoints and tastes on all sorts of topics. Thus a reader can see just how far he wants to trust his verdict.

**CRITICAL THOUGHTS...**That moaning heard up and down Broadway last week, reports Sylvester, News, came from producers who had just been informed by the big whisky distributor who had been supplying stage whisky for years, that they decided the whole thing wasn't worthwhile...Book stores should sell tickets to local and summer theatres, recommended J.R. Cominsky, Saturday Review publisher, at annual meeting of American Booksellers Association in Chicago...Variety's recent survey on dearth of balcony ticket buyers shows simply, sighs Kerr, Herald Tribune, that there is no new generation of theatre lovers coming into the theatre. And critic warns profession it had better busy itself trying to find out what the A.W.O.L. crowd might like.

**COLUMN TIP...**A Broadway hit comedy is having "backstage husband" problems, whispers Kilgallen...Wonderful Town chorus and Edith Adams, featured singer, have been given raises, reports Winchell.

**AWARDS REVISITED...**In examining the award records of the season, Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun, finds that many worthy performances were contributed by small part actors who somehow have been denied acclaim in the general rush to give honors to Shirley Booth and Rosalind Russell...After pointing out a few dubious angles to the confused awards business, Sheaffer, Eagle, concludes that at best the distribution of awards is an arbitrary and personal thing.

**TALENT TIPS...**Next season, Chapman, News, wishes in print, some actor like Tyrone Power, or Henry Fonda, who can talk well in good American, should impersonate that old time lecturer Mark Twain...It was sheer warmheartedness that made NY reviewers say rapturously that Victor Moore's portrayal in On Borrowed Time was the year's finest job, insists Watts, Post.

**ACTING REWARDS...**If a young man has the requisite qualities and is sufficiently determined to go through with it in tough times as well as soft, the rewards can be as about as exciting for the actor as for anyone, advises Hobe, Variety, in an article in Nassau, LI, Review Star. The requisites include first and foremost a steam engine constitution, plus intelligence, imagination, emotional depth, self discipline and a driving sense of dedication. Successful or not, the drama editor warns, the actor must endure and conquer periods of misfortune and discouragement.

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 ' NYC Theatre News Round Up '  
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Four shows closed May 30 : The Moon is Blue closed after 924 performances, An Evening with Beatrice Lillie closed after 278 performances, The Time of the Cuckoo after 265, and The Children's Hour after 189...My 3 Angels and The Cruelible have cut week end tops to \$4.80...Betty Lou Holland replaces Kim Stanley, Pionic...New National Theatre bill introduced in Washington by Rep Javitz, R-Liberal-NY which would set up government fund to aid drama, ballet and music productions by nonprofit groups.



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 ' Enterprise in Theatre Locations '  
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New York isn't the only theatre center in the world that has a theatre housing problem. London also has had no new theatres built in many years. The last theatre built in London's West End was the Saville in 1931. But the English city is nearer having its first new theatre than New York. A cornerstone, and only a cornerstone, for a British National Theatre has been laid by the Queen Mother on the South Bank more than years ago, though there is still no sign of work commencing any further.

The London theatre shortage, points out "Stage", British theatre trade weekly, might be solved temporarily by using cleverly converted buildings of historical interest for the presentation of plays.

Two current examples of such enterprise in making theatres where none existed before were detailed by the weekly. Bernard Miles has set up a replica of the famed Mermaid Theatre within the spacious piazza of the Royal Exchange. This is the first theatre in 200 years within the City of London proper to provide Shakespeare plays. This felicitous idea of turning a famous public building into a theatre, and Elizabethan at that, praises the weekly, lends new magic to the play and provides a worthwhile experience for pleasure seekers during the Coronation season.

Westminster Abbey will be another famous building used as a theatre, "Stage" outlines, when Christopher Hassall's specially written play, "Out of the Whirl-Wind" is presented there in June on a bare stage, without scenery, except for the Coronation dais and a decorative partition concealing the sanctuary. The audience will be seated on 3 sides of the acting area, providing playing conditions similar to those of the Elizabethan stage.

In Italy it seems things are done on an even grander scale. The huge Roman arena at Verona seating about 30,000 is used for monster production of ballet and opera. While other national monuments have been put to excellent practical use in England in recent years. Concerts have been given at the National Gallery, Hampton Court, the Victoria and Albert museum and Ken Wood.

Bernard Miles, by providing the city with a theatre that can be set up and taken down in one night, the trade paper editorial concludes, may be directly responsible for the temporary conversion of other national monuments....

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 ' Pros & Cons by T M K '  
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The saddest thing about the forthcoming destruction of the Empire Theatre is that no one, in spite of the rumors, has thought it profitable enough to erect a new theatre in the modern skyscraper going up this fall on the original theatre's site. NYC Council promises to speed passage of the long discussed building code amendments when and if someone shows definite interest in really erecting a new theatre. Perhaps the \$15,000 raised at "Highlights of Empire" would have been better used to conduct a research survey to find out if there really is anyone interested in building new theatres in NY.

No one will learn the secret formula on how to become a drama critic in NYC by reading "Just the Other Day", Ward Morehouse's confessions of the elements that go into the making of a stage-struck drama columnist and critic. But most theatre fans will find interesting the details of the highlights of the World Telegram & Sun columnist. The book published by McGraw Hill serves the useful purpose of guide to his friends, likes and dislikes. Thus it will help many theatre fans decide if they want to follow his future advice on plays.

